

# Animal welfare groups call for cat licensing in B.C.

BY STEPHANIE LAW, VANCOUVER SUN MAY 27, 2011



Trixie the cat takes a liking to a toy dog bank, at the SPCA in Victoria.

**Photograph by:** Adrian Lam, Timescolonist.com

Animal welfare and wildlife conservation advocates are calling on B.C. municipalities to implement cat licensing programs similar to those for dogs.

Craig Naherniak, general manager of humane education at the B.C. SPCA, said cities should follow the lead of Calgary, where cat licensing has proven successful since it became mandatory in 2007.

"Calgary is able to return stray cats to owners very quickly," Naherniak said. "It reduces sheltering costs and stress on the animals; it's a small price to pay to ensure people get their cats back."

Naherniak estimates that only about 10 per cent of stray cats at shelters are returned because many of them lack any identification, compared to around 80 per cent of dogs.

More than 3,500 dogs go missing each year in Vancouver. Up to 92 per cent of those with licenses are returned to their owners while most of those without a tag are not, according to the city's website.

The annual license fee is \$70 for dogs that aren't neutered or spayed and \$37 for those that are. The money collected helps fund the city pound, education programs and pet adoption services.

Calgary's responsible pet ownership bylaw also requires owners to keep cats on their property at all times, except if the cats are under the owner's control when off property.

Krystal Brennan, education coordinator at the Wildlife Rescue Association of B.C., said keeping cats indoors is good for the cat's safety and also prevents cats from attacking and often killing birds and small mammals.

"People don't really see that their cat can cause this much damage to wildlife," Brennan said. "Cats are natural predators that weren't native to this environment."

She said about 10 per cent of animals treated each year at their rescue facility have been attacked by cats.

Sherrill Guthrie, associate producer of the CBC documentary, *Crazed Cats*, said B.C. municipalities are violating the Migratory Birds Convention Act, a federal law, by allowing cat owners to let their pets run wild. B.C. is home to more than 300 species of birds and is on the Pacific Flyway, which is a main bird migration route.

"It is a frightening contradiction that municipalities allow cat owners to let their cats go out and kill these birds when, in fact, individuals aren't allowed to capture or kill these species."

The town of Creston, B.C. became the first and only place in B.C. to mandate cat licensing in 2009.

Mayor Ron Toyota said it has helped resolve a feral cat problem in the area. Feral cats are those born in the wild, who aren't friendly to humans.

"When we have a stray cat we can see if it's licensed," Toyota said. "And if it's not and is a feral cat, we spay or neuter it and then relocate it to a contained environment, mostly farms and rural areas."

Feral cats are a problem in many parts of B.C., but other municipalities have yet to follow Creston's lead. Maple Ridge's council voted against passing a cat-licensing bylaw in May 2010.

Vancouver has no plans to start a program, said city spokeswoman Wendy Stewart.

*slaw@vancouver.sun.com*

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun